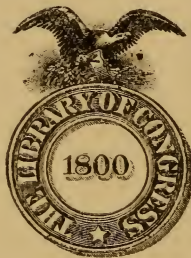


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**SERMON,**

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1856

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ON THE DAY

OF ANNUAL THANKSGIVING

IN THE

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BY JOHN SNELLING POPKIN, A.M.

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# SERMON.

## GALATIANS 5. 1.

STAND FAST, THEREFORE, IN THE LIBERTY, WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE, AND BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.

**THIS** liberty, I suppose firstly, is a freedom from the Hebrew ceremonial; and, probably, from the heathen superstitions and idolatries. Further, it is a deliverance from the sentence of the law. In the fourth verse it is said, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace:” And\* “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” Again, we think, it implies an emancipation from the bondage of sin. †“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. ‡Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. ¶Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

In this manner we might discourse upon the text, if we purposed to treat it in a close and doctrinal way. But on this occasion we propose to use the words, by way of accommodation, to introduce a discourse on this subject; That Christianity is conducive to Civil Liberty. This use, however, we hope, will be found, not wholly foreign from the text, but rather a legitimate corollary, or consequence.

\* Gal. 3. 13.

† Rom. 8. 2.

‡ Rom. 6. 18.

¶ John 8. 34, 36.

The Gospel claims the highest praise and thanksgiving, as it is the way of salvation. But it affords great cause for gratitude on account of the temporal benefits, which it is calculated to produce, while the chief aim and end, to which it directs, is the glory of God, and eternal life. “By the mercy and the grace of God we are saved through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. But we are saved in turning us from sin and iniquity, and creating us in Christ Jesus unto good works.” The indubitable design of the gospel is, to make its subjects *good*; good and true men; good in every relation and every duty; good and honest citizens; good and faithful Rulers.

Thus we may see at once, how true religion in its genuine influence operates in favor of civil liberty, inasmuch as it tends to make good and faithful rulers, and honest and good citizens.

In proceeding I shall not mark a precise method or division; but will give you a sketch of the train of thought. I propose to speak firstly of the nature of civil liberty, and of the influence of Christianity, in general terms: Then to consider one or two objections: And then to enter more particularly into the operation of several Christian virtues and graces.

Of liberty, I pretend not to give the studied and exact definitions of a civilian. Sufficient for my purpose is this expression of holy scripture—\*“That we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” This may be taken as a good description of a happy state of society; and it is very evident, that the tendency of the Christian religion, and the effect of it, so far as it prevails, is to establish such a state of society; in which we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

True liberty is not licentiousness, not anarchy, not freedom from all law, and order, and right, and virtue. It is not the right, or the power, of the strongest, and the oppression of the weak. It is not that condition, in which “every one may do, whatsoever is right in his own eyes;” which right for the most part would

\* 1 Tim. 2. 2.

be wrong in the eyes of reason. It is not that state, in which "every man's hand is against his neighbour;" nor that, in which every thing is carried by the lawless will and force of a mad multitude. Civil liberty is not civil warfare.

"What is it then?" It appears to me to be a state, in which the people are governed and secured by just, and good, and equal laws, wisely made, and truly and faithfully administered; where they are secured in their just rights, and honest pursuits and possessions, and guarded from wrong, from suffering, and from doing wrong, as far as may be practicable in human society and human nature.\*

To effect these good purposes some forms of government are more conducive, than others. Absolute power in the hands of one man, or a few, becomes tyrannical and oppressive. But the most absolute despotism is not so terrible and atrocious, as the rage of an uncontrolled and inflamed multitude. A monarchy may be a happy state, if the sovereign be wise and good. The people of Israel or Judah were happier under a good king, "who ruled in the fear of God," and according to the established law of the Lord, than they were, "when there was no king nor judge in Israel." But power without restraint will commonly be exercised without reason or moderation. That the people may be happily governed, it is necessary, that established laws, and good laws, should rule, and not the arbitrary will of men. That form of government promises best, where there is a due check and control upon the will both of the rulers and the people. The Elective form appears most promising and happy in theory; where the rulers are chosen by the people, and may be reduced again to private stations; and where on the other side there are principles of stability in the government, sufficient to stay the force of popular impulse, and give time for reflection and consideration. We cannot give up the hope, that it may ultimately be found best in practice. But there is no human good without attendant evil. Every thing human, and divine, is lia-

\* See Note at the end.

ble to abuse in this world. This promising and flattering system is subject to the deep abuses of error, and delusion, and corruption. A good measure of general knowledge and virtue is necessary for its just and successful operation, and even for its stable and real existence. For want of a sufficient degree of these requisite qualifications we may unwittingly or wilfully place incompetent or unprincipled men in power; and consent to measures injurious and ruinous, and which may terminate in our degradation and servitude. "Wisdom and knowledge must be the stability of the times, and strength of salvation," \* under such a constitution.

Now the true wisdom is that, "which is from above," † the best knowledge is that, "which came down from heaven." This divine wisdom and knowledge are most conducive, most requisite, to secure the advantages, and remedy the evils, of what we esteem our peculiar privileges, our free constitutions. As we have observed, the Gospel operates to make good men; and good men will endeavor to make good rulers; and good rulers will labor to make a good use of their power. They will regard it as a sacred trust, for which they are awfully accountable. Their great object will be, to serve the Lord, and promote the publick good, to the best and utmost of their ability. The Gospel rectifies the mind, the will, and the judgment; subdues inordinate affections and passions; gives men a single view to duty and the general good; and, we may add, in many ways it "increases knowledge." Particularly to the present point, a religious sense of duty will set men to consider and inquire seriously, that they may know, how to perform their publick duty "rightly in the sight of God;" will lay their minds open to conviction; and repress the passions and prejudices, which might close their eyes against light and knowledge. We cannot indeed presume, that a good man will never err; nor that a good people would never choose a bad ruler. But a good man will be ready and happy to correct his error on sufficient conviction: And a good, and upright, and judicious people will stand as a solid

\* Isaiah 33. 6.

† See James 3. 17.

obstruction to the evil designs of bad rulers. Especially, under an elective constitution, the government cannot proceed, nor continue, long, without a majority of the people. But it is possible, that a majority may be secured by other means, than those which religion approves. And it is possible, that designs may be formed and fixed, unperceived, or unresisted, which a majority cannot overthrow without violent and dreadful exertions. However, it is a general and undeniable truth, that the good order, and good government, and therefore the real liberty of a people, are in a very great measure connected with their general character in respect to virtue; and religion is the right and solid foundation of virtue; and the gospel, of religion. It is well said, "that the service of God is the most perfect freedom." This is true in a civil, as well as in a religious sense.

These, I suppose, are plain thoughts; too plain, perhaps, to be minutely detailed. But thoughts are not the less important, because they are true. It is better to follow truth, than fiction. Plain truth is more useful, than ingenious conceits; and the most useful principles are often the most plain and evident. "If ye *know* these things, happy are ye, if ye *do* them." The consequence is, that the gospel claims our most serious attention and obedience, for our temporal welfare, publick and private, as well as for our eternal salvation.

It cannot, then, be correctly alleged, that religion has no concern with publick interests and duties. In fact, it often has too little connexion with politicks. But of right, it ought to be the most sacred and commanding law of publick, as well as private duty; and the importance of its influence is in proportion to the magnitude and consequence of these interests and transactions, and the danger, the temptation, and extensive mischiefs and miseries of iniquity in their management. We must readily admit, that religion enjoins and sanctions the duties of parents and children, husbands and wives, families and neighbors: and, to be consistent and reasonable, we must equally admit, that the relations and duties of citizens and rulers should

be regarded, as under the law and sanction of religion; those relations and duties, in which the interests, the property, the comfort, the morals, the hopes, the lives, the souls, the present and eternal state of thousands and millions are deeply concerned. But if we can withdraw these cases from the present rule, we cannot withdraw them from the "righteous judgment of God." All the influence and prevalence of religion and virtue contribute to the publick welfare; and the publick or general good is a great argument, by which the interests of religion and virtue are to be urged, and vice and impiety opposed.

Take away all knowledge and influence of religion, and what will remain of virtue? Take away all virtue, and what will remain but a chaos of confusion and misery? No freedom could be enjoyed, where no security, order, or right could be maintained. Indeed despotism would be the result; and would be a refuge; but a miserable refuge; an incessant struggle and war between competitors for empire; or an iron yoke of bondage, which would hold the people in subjection to stern and oppressive power.

But we are aware of objections, that may be brought against our doctrine of liberty. Would it not be more proper to draw from the gospel the doctrine of unqualified subjection? Does it not inculcate upon us the most "passive obedience and non-resistance"? St. Paul says,\* "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." St. Peter and St. Jude speak in terms of strong disapprobation of those, "who despise government: presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities; whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. †Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of

\* Rom. 13. 1, 2.

† 2 Peter 2. 10, 11.

Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.\* The Lord Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world."†

It cannot be denied, that obedience and respect to government are enjoined in strong terms : and obedience and respect to the powers, that then existed, to the despotick empire, and ferocious emperors of Rome. The Lord Jesus came not to erect an earthly kingdom ; nor to overthrow the established governments by a military force ; nor to raise his disciples against them in insurrection and rebellion. His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom ; his power operated by persuasion and spiritual influence. His gospel produced a change in the people by reforming their minds and their lives ; by reclaiming them from vice, and teaching them to live peaceably and justly, in obedience to the laws of God ; and to the laws of man, so far as they were consistent with the divine or moral laws. His religion spread by the power of truth and the Spirit, against violent opposition, till it became the acknowledged religion of the empire. His doctrine extended its influence to the principles and manners of the state and government. His doctrine had no small effect upon the character of the potentates ; insomuch that after the Emperors acknowledged the Christian religion, though many and great vices adhered to the supreme power, none, I think, were so monstrously wicked, as many in former times ; and some respected his religion, and submitted in some degree to its laws. But all such effects were produced in the way of a moral and spiritual influence.

Yet, although our Lord and his apostles required submission to human laws and magistrates, the injunction was not unlimited. The believers were not allowed to deny their faith, or violate their duty to God, when they were so ordered by human powers. When the rulers of the Jews forbade the Apostles to teach in the name of Jesus, they firmly replied, "We ought to obey God, rather than men."‡ The disciples were not allowed to obey the magistrates, who commanded

\* Jude 9.

† John 18. 36.

‡ Acts 5. 29.

them to deny Christ, and sacrifice to idols. As they could not submit to the law, and keep their faith and a good conscience ; they must submit to the penalty, and trust in God for a recompense. Thus did many prove their faith, and bare witness to the truth and power of the gospel, by submitting to a cruel death.

St. Peter does say,\* “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” But this general rule must admit the exception of the paramount duties, which we owe to God, when the laws or orders of man would interfere with them. The Lord Jesus has drawn the just distinction.† “Render unto Cesar the things, which are Cesar’s ; and unto God the things, that are God’s.” But, if they interfere, “We ought to obey God, rather than men.”

A critical discussion of these and other passages is not necessary to the present occasion.

The gospel was calculated to operate under any form of government ; and to improve every form by infusing good principles and morals. It was calculated, not merely for a monarchy, nor merely for a republick ; “but for all men every where, commanding them to repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance,” and perform their duty in their appointed stations ;‡ to improve the present condition of mankind ; and to prepare its subjects for eternal happiness. It was adapted, if possible, to avoid, not to offer, nor provoke hostile resistance. Its good effects are produced by rectifying the sentiments and morals, by swaying and controlling the minds of men, whether in power, or in subjection.

But where a government is so constituted, that the people have a place and influence in forming and directing the administration by the election of the rulers ; there it is no unlawful resistance or disobedience to the ordinance of man, or of God, to endeavor to exercise this most valuable right, and to perform this momentous duty, “in all good conscience” and good intelligence. In this case, the ordinance of man, the ordinance, which freemen have made for themselves, under the good providence of the Lord, places the e-

\* 1 Epis. 2. 12. † Matt. 22. 21. ‡ Acts 17. 30 ; 26. 20 ; 1 Cor. 7. 17—24.



lective power in the hands of the people ; and therefore it is their right and their duty, to obtain the most accurate information, and to form the most exact judgment, that they can, of publick men, and measures, and candidates : and therefore those, who are able, ought to be willing, and have a right, which ought not to be impeded, to assist their brethren in pursuing this highly important examination. In this case, they are not resisting a power *set over them* ; they are exercising a power *inherent in them*. In this case, the *people* are the powers that be, ordained, as we hope, “by the good hand of God upon us.” This is a duty of religion ; it comes fairly within the scope, and under the law of religion ; and ought to be most religiously, conscientiously, and carefully performed ; and, I apprehend, there are few duties of social life, for which we are more deeply accountable.

Yet in performing it, let us endeavor to find and follow the right line of conduct, which commonly lies between extremes. The sacred word prohibits “ railing and reviling accusations, and speaking evil of dignities ;” and a good cause would lose nothing by regarding the prohibition. But the word of truth, we trust, does not forbid speaking truth, and employing reason, so far as may be necessary for the honest, and lawful, and faithful discharge of our duty. Must we go blindfold to ruin, or with our eyes open, and say and do nothing, however true, right and requisite, to prevent the catastrophe? We hope, we are not so made free, as to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. We believe, these privileges were not given us to be despised ; nor these talents, to be buried in the earth. The divine word requires our submission to the laws and ordinances of man, when they are not contrary to the laws of the Lord or of righteousness ; but it does not forbid us to use all the lawful means and influence, that we may possess, to procure good laws and ordinances, and to change those, that are manifestly evil, or detrimental to the community. The gospel is friendly to all good order, righteousness, and peace ; but not to unrighteous and arbitrary domination.

Again, it may be objected, that religion has often been made an engine, to awe, and subdue, and enslave the human mind. It may be alleged, that upon the assumed basis of the Christian religion has been erected a stupendous system of ecclesiastical dominion. But we may confidently affirm, that it was not the pure and humble religion of Jesus Christ; it was the abuse and invention of ambitious men, which gave rise and support to such a system; and we must confess, that this "manner of spirit" is too common to man. This is not the spirit of the gospel, not the Spirit of Jesus Christ. As soon as the pure spirit of the gospel is perceived and followed, it is found highly favorable to mutual justice and charity, to all the rights, and best interests of mankind. It is easy to be perceived, and we may invite an objector to examine fairly, and trust that he must perceive, that if a people were in a good measure influenced and regulated by its true principles and rules, they would constitute a well ordered, upright, peaceable, friendly and happy society: and, supposing the same to be the spirit of the civil and ecclesiastical institutions and officers, there would be nothing in them of oppression, or severity, or usurpation; no objects, nor designs, but the constant and vigilant study and promotion of the general happiness.

Thus we return from considering objections to the original subject, the tendency of the gospel to produce, not only the real welfare, but also the true liberty of mankind.

Let it be granted, (what, we trust, will not be denied by any serious and respectable persons,) that the genuine fruit, or effect of Christianity "is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth."\* Then let us make a supposition, which unhappily must remain only a supposition; but may serve at present for an argument; let us suppose, "that the people were all righteous," good and true, all religious, all good christians, and that the government were of the same character. There would be not much business for government, excepting to direct the energies of the people to objects of publick utility. The people would live in

\* Eph. 5. 9.

the free enjoyment of their rights, and in the communications of mutual benevolence, without force and without molestation. Perhaps it might be necessary to define some of their rights and some of their duties; but these regulations would occasion no severe constraint; they would not be burdensome. They are the vices, and iniquities, and crimes of men, which render severities necessary; and give occasion for the increase of power and rigor. Or, if this remedy be not provided, or be not effectual, they render every thing insecure, and every person subject to continual dangers, vexations, and distresses. They are the vices and corruptions of men, which afford opportunities, and instruments, for the abuse of power, and for successful usurpation. General virtue, or rather religion, is the most effectual security of freedom; and the gospel, as the source of religion and virtue, is preeminently conducive to the security and enjoyment of this highly and justly valued privilege. If therefore we wish to contribute the most surely and abundantly to secure and perpetuate the noble character and privileges of freemen, we must diligently cultivate the virtues, and the principles, and the influence of the Christian religion.

Let us descend from general ideas, to consider the operation of a few particular virtues and principles.

The very terms, the very words, which are used to express the several parts of religion and virtue, go directly to prove their tendency to maintain the essential rights, the rational liberties, together with the good order and general welfare of human society. But we mean a religion consisting "not in word only, but in deed and in truth." We mean not merely the name, but the prevalence and practice of religion. Let us take the terms before used. "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness and truth."

Righteousness, in the Scriptures, has various degrees and modes of signification. In this place, we receive it, as signifying justice, equity, the correct and conscientious observance and maintenance of right. It is opposed to all wrong, to all injustice; to all invasion of the rights of others, and of the people in general; to all abuse of the powers, with which any are entrusted;

to all resistance to just authority. If power be unlawfully or injuriously exercised, the just will seek a lawful remedy, or such as may be justified by sound reason and right principles. The righteous will endeavor to maintain right according to their ability: to observe it themselves, and induce others to observe it; and that it may be supported in the community. They are in principle opposed, and, as far as they are able, they will in practice be opposed, to every thing injurious and detrimental to the community, or any part of the community; to mankind, or any part or portion of their fellow-men. They will also be ready and solicitous to fulfil their duty, in whatever station they may be placed. To fulfil their various duties, is to contribute to the common welfare. The general good is the reason, on which the laws of righteousness are founded; the end for which they are calculated. They will consider and feel themselves accountable to "the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness." A just and serious respect to Him is the greatest and best principle of righteousness. Godliness and honesty are well connected in the sacred language. Undoubtedly the prevalence of godliness and honesty is the best and greatest security for leading quiet and peaceable lives. What more or better liberty can we desire? Do we wish for the liberty of invading others? Are we then willing, that they should have the equal liberty of invading us? Are we not free, unless we are allowed to assault others, or compelled to defend ourselves, with force and arms? Are we not free, unless every man be armed at all points; every house, in fact, a castle; and every field, a field of blood? Is it not evident, that order is the law of liberty; and is it not also evident, that true religion would give us both together; "liberty with order;" making them not only consistent, but coincident? Nay, but to be free, we must not only be secured from the ravages of anarchy; we must be exempt from the oppressions of tyranny; and, as far as may be, from the danger of tyranny and oppression; we must have a free constitution of government. True; much may depend on a well devised form of government; and on continual vigilance and

prudence : but more, on “ following after righteousness, godliness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”\* The best constitutions and ordinances, that can be devised, will not secure liberty and order to a vicious and corrupt people. But publick virtue and sound principles will be a powerful security, if ever “ a people, that is in such a case,” should fall under a vicious and corrupt government. We must proceed to some other christian virtues.

Goodness, charity, benevolence is the great social law of Christ: it includes the law of righteousness, “and magnifies the law, and makes it honourable.” It is declared to be the fulfilling of the law. So says the Apostle in the present chapter.† “ For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty ; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” The same Apostle offers the same sentiments in his chapter on government.‡ We cannot better evince, we cannot by any means so well evince and illustrate the excellence and beneficial operation of this great and good law of our Lord, as by reciting the very terms, in which it is stated and described by divine inspiration. The principle is divine and persuasive ; and most extensive and productive of good in its application. The most generous, and happy, and fruitful principle of duty, is the love of our duty, and of Him who appoints it ; and of the creatures, whom he has made to be the objects of our benevolence. The love of God is the highest and richest source of benevolence to man. “ Love worketh no ill to his neighbour,” to society, to mankind ; harbours, admits no evil designs ; restrains the lusts and passions, which “ war” against duty, and “ against the soul,” “ whence come wars and fightings ;” excites and directs to all the efforts and measures, which are promotive of social happiness and publick prosperity ; connects the interest of the individual with the interest of the communi-

\* 1 Tim. 6. 11. 2 Tim. 2. 22.

† Gal. 5. 13—15.

‡ Rom. 13. 7—10.

ty, of the parts with that of the whole. And they are in truth so connected. "For, if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." If we pursue private or partial interests against the general interest; if we follow "our hearts' own lust" against the principles of righteousness and benevolence, which are calculated for the general good, we shall act against the security and enjoyment of life and property; we shall forfeit the peace and satisfaction of conscience; and we shall sin against God and provoke his judgments. To the truly good the publick welfare, in itself, will be an object of active desire and exertion. But the wisely good will discern and pursue the real and substantial welfare and prosperity of the publick; and will not be dazzled by the false glare of glory, which is but splendid misery, or undisguised ruin.

Christian charity is the most just and generous principle of true patriotism. The name of patriotism has been so often and so grossly debased to cover the worst designs, that we hesitate to use it in commendation of religion. But there may be a true patriotism, a true love of our country; a natural and moral sentiment; which may be improved and rectified by christianity. That sincere, enlarged, and religious benevolence, that hearty desire of doing and promoting good, of avoiding and suppressing evil, in the love and the fear of God, which the gospel teaches and inspires, is the most just and efficacious principle, to animate us to subserve the Divine goodness, and benefit our fellow creatures, in every state and relation, in which Providence has placed us. Therefore it is most efficacious, to render its subjects faithful and zealous in their relation to their country, their native land, where their station is appointed, and their services are required; a civil community, whose interests are "transcendental," in which the interests of millions are deeply involved. These strong ties will not be weakened, but strengthened by the christian spirit. At the same time a Christian patriotism possesses this honorable advantage, that while it is true to our own country, it is also just to other people and nations. It has been objected to the Christian religion, that it neglects the high and noble virtue

of patriotism ; that this is not commended in the doctrine of Jesus and his apostles. The answer is easy, and might be copious. We may observe, that St. Paul had “ continual sorrow in his heart for his kinsmen according to the flesh,” who hated and persecuted him ; that the Lord Jesus wept and mourned for his own nation, which was ready to crucify him. But it will be sufficient to observe, that this religion has the best influence to engage men to do their duty in all points ; “ to abstain from evil, and do good as they have opportunity ; to make the rulers just, ruling in the fear of God ;” and the people justly obedient to the laws, “ and ready to every good work ;” and this is true and honest patriotism, without ostentation or ambition. Far from a defect, it is an honor to the gospel, that it does not inculcate, nor admit, that species of patriotism, which would wrong or destroy other people, for the false glory, or honor, or interest of our own nation. It is a doctrine of universal righteousness and benevolence. But this universal law by no means annuls, it rather enforces our duty to the state or nation, in which we are placed by the “ Lord and Possessor of heaven and earth.”

This divine doctrine supports the just rights of all men. It is peculiarly a doctrine of equality ; of all that equality, which is consistent with the regular establishment of society. It teaches us to respect all the true rights of man, without the madness or wickedness, that would rob and destroy him under the pretence of maintaining his rights and vindicating his liberties. However low a man may be in the world, the christian spirit regards him as a man ; to whom our Creator has given a rational soul, whom he has made for eternity. “ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him ; male and female created he them.\* If this image has fallen from “ glory and honor,” this is a doctrine of humility : And if it be restored, it is not raised to pride. The rich and poor meet together ; the Lord is the Maker of them all.”† Before the throne of the Eternal, all distinctions vanish—but the distinctions of religion.

“ The grace and truth, which came by Jesus Christ,”

\* Gen. 1. 27.

† Prov. 22. 2.

forbid the powerful to look down upon any of their fellow men, as an inferior order of beings, made only for their service, made only to be slaves, or subjects of their arbitrary will. Wherever the gospel has prevailed in truth, it has had a great tendency, and a great effect, “to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke;”\* to abolish or mitigate slavery; to relieve the condition of captives; to lighten the horrors of dungeons; to diminish the degradation of vassallage, and the oppressions of privileged and tyrannical orders; to raise from the dust the most numerous part of the human species, and give them the standing and character of men. And this good it confers on man, not by violence and convulsion, not by breaking up at once all the foundations of society; but by the gradual, penetrating, and meliorating influence of truth, and just and generous sentiments. It still teaches us, “to render honour to whom honour is due:” and, we may add, humanity to whom humanity is due.

I know not, when we should come to an end, if we would trace out all the social and civil benefits of “religion and morality.” The great, and good, and wise Father of our nation has said in his last address: “A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity.”—WASHINGTON.

Let us speak a word concerning truth. Veracity, a strict regard to truth, is one of the principal Christian virtues. Truth is the bond of confidence; the instrument of all righteousness. Falsehood, deception, delusion, breach of faith, or of promise, are the means of carrying on all wicked designs; by which men are wronged, and states are betrayed, subverted, enslaved, and ruined. “Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.”† When people “receive not the love of the truth, they are given up to strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”‡ In a corrupt state falsehood meets a readier reception, than sincerity; it is flattering and accommodated to corrupt passions and propensities: and we may take it as a general rule, that the purposes of falsehood are wickedness, and the counsels of truth are righteousness. We can scarcely

\* Is. 58. 6.

† Is. 59. 14.

‡ 2 Thes. 2. 10, 11.



imagine a more wretched character and condition, than that "there is no truth in the land."\*

All vice, all sin, all corruption, all licentiousness, all profligacy, operate not only to "the reproach," but to bring on the ruin of any people; the subversion of their rights and liberties, as well as of their peace and prosperity. The dissolute, rapacious and unprincipled will be the ready tools, or artificers, of nefarious plans and practices, hardened against the convictions of truth, and the remonstrances of righteousness. To all these vices and their consequences the gospel stands directly and firmly opposed, with the weight of divine authority and divine judgment.

A profound and habitual sense of the Divine authority, and government, and judgment, is the great and commanding principle of duty and fidelity in every condition and relation: and the Gospel is the foundation of true, vital, effectual religion. "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."† This divine system combines all the most essential and powerful motives, sources, and fruits of religion; righteousness and mercy, truth and grace, fear and love, faith and obedience, time and eternity. It constrains the soul, not only by the fear of judgment, but by the love of God, and of duty, of all that is agreeable to the divine perfections. It is the main support of all righteousness, goodness, truth, and every virtue. The general influence of religion upon society is that, which principally upholds the sentiments and habits, that are necessary to social peace, and comfort, and enjoyment, and preserves that regard to truth, in the fear of God, which is essential to the very existence of civil order and the administration of justice. In the present state of society, the rejection of revealed religion would be followed by the rejection or contempt of natural religion; the evidences in nature and reason of the Divine existence and government. Though they are strong in themselves, the presumptuous mind of man can too easily reject or evade them; studying to reduce them to its own will and pleasure, or sin, and to release itself from all sense of moral obligation. The firm believers in revealed re-

\* Hcs. 4. 1.

† 1 Cor 3. 11.

igion are the firmest believers in natural religion. It is the light of the "Sun of righteousness," which "chases the darkness of the mind" and the world, and "unveils" in the heavens and the earth the glory of the Creator, the "one, living and true God." That, which is called modern philosophy, marches with rapid step from infidelity to atheism, and all the horrors of unbridled rage and rapacity. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the *tender mercies* of the wicked are *cruel*." Do we think it an advantage to be freed from religious obligation? Let us think of the ruin, which this unbelief makes in this world; and of the ruin, with which it is threatened in the future; and be assured that our unbelief will not refute the truth of God, nor reverse his judgment. A people, who are in general, or in a principal and leading part, destitute of all apprehension and restraint of a religious nature, must be the slaves of faction, and intrigue, and violence, of the reign of terror, or of the stern and crushing reign of despotism.

It is extremely and inexpressibly important to the happiness, and the rights and liberties of a people, that those, to whom power is committed, should be men, who will exercise it "in all good conscience before God." Power is attended with strong temptations; and a solemn and awful sense of responsibility is requisite to restrain men from the abuse of power, from usurpation, from iniquitous projects, from injurious measures; to bind them to the faithful performance of their duty; to oblige them conscientiously to respect the rights and study the happiness of the people. Much is said of honor; and honor is a pretty good notion, if it be truly honorable. But there may be very honorable society in the world, where a man may do shameful and "abominable works," and still be a very honorable man. This notion of honor depends much on opinion, which may be very lax and licentious, and admit many and great vices without shame. The true honor is that, "which cometh from God." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." "The fool hath said in his *heart*, There is no God: They are corrupt; they have done abominable works; there

is none that doeth good." § Such is the connexion of ideas in the sacred scriptures; and it is evident to reason and experience.

The honor and prevalence of religion in the community also are of great importance in respect to the affairs of government. The sentiments and habits of the people will have no small influence on the government; especially where the officers are elected, and for short periods. They will have their influence in the elections, and on the course of administration: and the administration also may have its influence upon the opinions, and pursuits, and choice of the people. But, as the prevalence of moral evil gives license to evil, and obstruction to good counsels; so the prevalence of good principles and habits gives encouragement to good, and obstruction to evil counsels. We add, that as the perversion of the will has an effect to pervert and debase the understanding; so the rectitude of the will has an effect to rectify and exalt the understanding and the judgment. We may further observe in fact, as well as in reason, that sound religion is the *patron* of sound knowledge, and the *ensor* of unsound theories and speculations. When men of science have departed from this "pillar and ground of the truth," they have run on to the most wild and pernicious extravagancies, which would shock all common, and moral sense. Religion is the most efficient author and preserver of the means of education; of our town and district schools, by law established; and the principal seminaries, the Colleges and Universities in this country, and I think in Europe, were originally founded for the purpose of religious instruction; and without this purpose, probably, would not have existed. This is a copious and fruitful theme. We might show the great connexion between the institutions of religion and of education; and between these and the permanence and reality of Republican institutions. At least, that we may know, what is going on, and what we ought to do, we must have common learning enough to read the papers; to use "the liberty of the press," and also to obviate the abuse. "The liberty of the press is essential to the security of freedom in a State; it ought not,

therefore, to be restrained in this Commonwealth." *Constitution of Massachusetts, Declaration of Rights, Article 16.*

But we must conclude. We cannot doubt, I think, but that knowledge, and virtue, and piety, and Christianity are most conducive and requisite to Civil Liberty and order, and publick prosperity. We may even apply to this subject the words of the Lord Jesus. \**"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."* May this be our personal improvement.

On these occasions, it is usual and proper, to take notice of the blessings, and various events and concerns of the year, the seasons, and the times; for which we have left no time. Divine providence has been pleased to bestow upon us a good harvest; of which blessing we may estimate the value by the scarcity of the last year, and the continued difficulties of the present. But even mercies seem to augment our miseries. The customary communications and supplies are obstructed; and many are deprived of the means of subsistence; and all must eventually feel the pressure. The Gospel teaches, and at this time with special urgency; *"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."*† *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."*‡ This great law of charity is applicable to a variety of cases; to sufferings, and sympathy and mutual succour; as well as to faults, and emulations, or mutual concessions. As to our public affairs, which are mostly affairs of war, they are the subjects of continual discourse and publication. I shall only say, that I cannot rejoice in the calamities of my country, even if they are deserved; nor in her successes, unless I am satisfied, that the cause is good. *"My soul, wait thou only upon God. The Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for Him."*§

\*John 8. 31, 32, 36. † Phil. 2. 4. ‡ Gal. 6. 2. § Psa'm 62. 5. Isaiah 30. 18.

**NOTE.** In order to do some justice to the subject, a few extracts from approved Authors are subjoined.

Dr. Paley's definition is this : "*Civil Liberty is the not being restrained by any Law, but what conduces in a greater degree to the public welfare.*"

"To do what we will is natural liberty; to do what we will, consistently with the interest of the community to which we belong, is civil liberty; that is to say, the only liberty to be desired in a state of civil society."

But natural liberty, we think, ought to be modified by natural law, or the law of nature; as Professor Christian suggests in his Notes on Judge Blackstone's Commentaries.

"The *libertas quidlibet faciendi*, or the liberty of doing every thing which a man's passions urge him to attempt, or his strength enables him to effect, is savage ferocity; it is the liberty of a tyger and not the liberty of a man."

"Moral or natural liberty (in the words of Burlamaqui) is the right which nature gives to all mankind of disposing of their persons and property after the manner they judge most consonant to their happiness, on condition of their acting within the limits of the law of nature, and that they do not any way abuse it to the prejudice of any other men."

*Civil Liberty* is defined by Judge Blackstone to be "that of a member of society, and is no other than *natural liberty* so far restrained by human laws (and no farther) as is necessary and expedient for the general advantage of the public."

The mention of restraint by *human laws* may be deemed to imply other restraints by *natural* or *moral* laws.

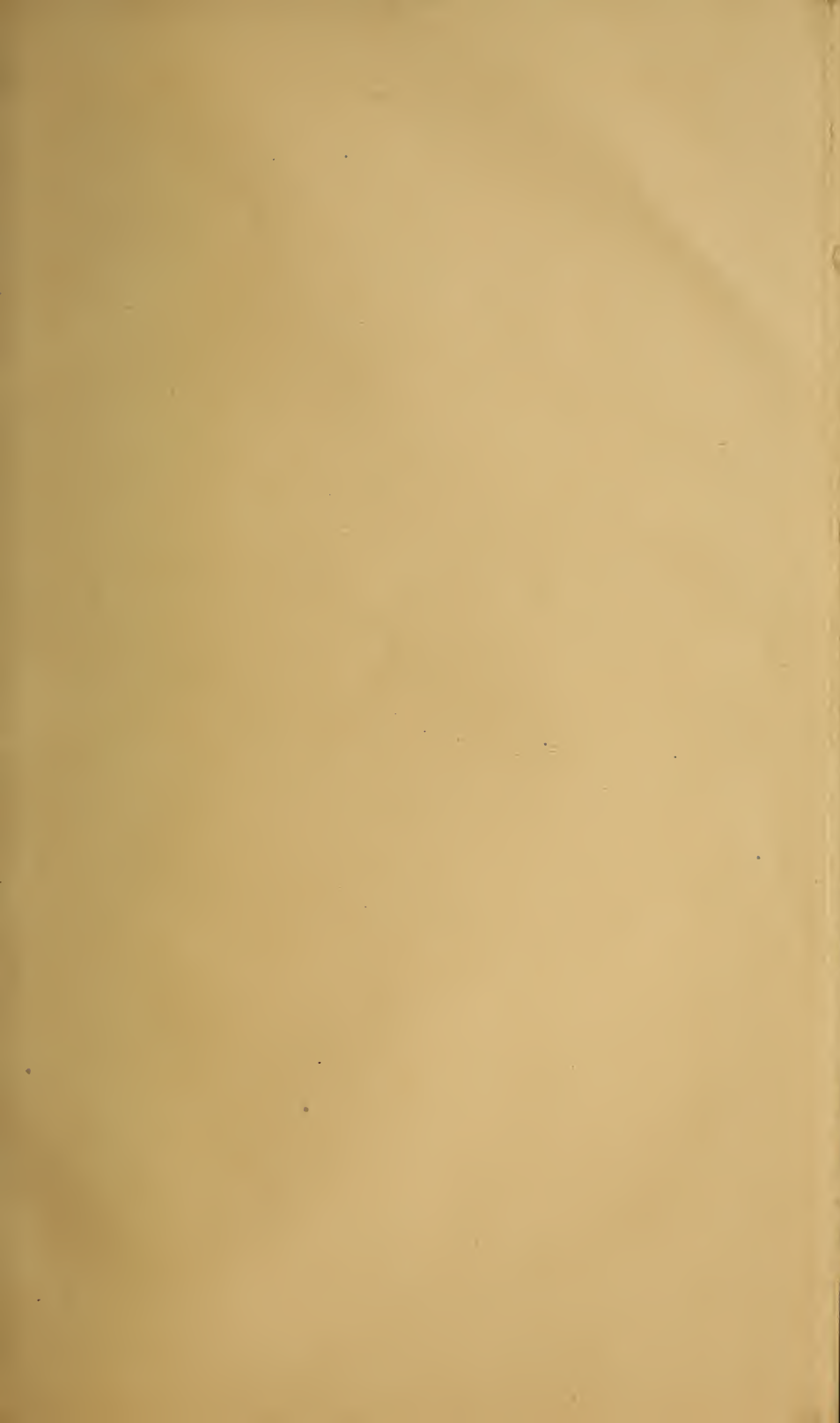
"*Political liberty* (says Mr. Christian) may be defined to be the security with which, from the constitution, form, and nature of the established government, the subjects enjoy *civil liberty*."

I had Paley's and other writings on this subject in my study, but neglected, or rather forgot to consult them on the occasion. My principal object in the discourse was, to exhibit in some measure the benefit of Christianity to society, in promoting all righteousness, all right and duty, in rulers and people; and therefore, moral, civil, and political liberty: and liberty was regarded as a favorite theme, and a good argument, and a good object. By this argument, among others, it was thought fit, to endeavor to advance the cause of religion, and with it the good of society, in my place and measure, in my hearers and myself. In pursuing the present object it appeared proper to say something of liberty and law in general terms; without pretending to legal precision and method; but rather leaving the definition and declaration of rights to the approved principles of justice, and to political constitutions. With the object before mentioned in view, it was not deemed meet, to descend to particular cases; nor to proceed to the extreme cases, and extreme remedies, which are found in writings of respectable reputation; for instance, the question or doctrine of the right of resistance to intolerable publick grievances, impositions, or dangers, which admit no other or easier remedy. This right was maintained and defended in this country in the American Revolution.

The scriptural doctrines or precepts of submission Dr. Paley con-

siders as general rules; which, like other general rules, and like other general precepts in the scriptures, may admit exceptions and limitations. He supposes two different questions concerning them. If the question be general, whether obedience be due to government? the answer is general, that it is due in reason and religion. In this case it is unnecessary to mention exceptions. This he takes to be the case and meaning of the christian precepts. But if it be further inquired, whether submission be due "in all cases whatsoever," "of public grievances, of exorbitant taxes, of acts of cruelty and oppression, of tyrannical encroachments upon the ancient or stipulated rights of the people? or whether it be justifiable to join in an attempt to shake off the yoke by open resistance?" this he views as a very different question, and requiring a different consideration, concerning the extent and limitation of power and allegiance. "He would reply, that if public expediency be the foundation, it is also the measure of civil obedience; that the duty of allegiance is neither unlimited nor unconditional; that patience becomes culpable pusillanimity, when it serves only to encourage our rulers to increase the weight of our burthen, or to bind it the faster; that the submission, which surrenders the liberty of a nation, and entails slavery upon future generations, is enjoined by no law of rational morality:" and finally, the question, or the answer with him turns, not so much upon the right, which appears not to be doubted, as upon the expediency of opposition. This he concludes to be "the distinction to be taken in interpreting these passages of Scripture. They inculcate the *duty*, they do not describe the *extent* of it; nor consider the limits by which it is bounded."

The scriptures themselves, as we have observed, do in other places set limits to the general rule of submission; exceptions of the Divine commands and the duties of religion. Therefore it is not inconsistent with the nature of the general rule, to suppose that there may be other moral and rational exceptions. Those, that are expressed, are such, as were adapted to the circumstances of the early Christians; and it is not improbable, that the rule itself was peculiarly, though not exclusively, adapted to their circumstances. There is reason to conjecture, that some were apt to mistake the liberty, which was preached, or proclaimed to them, a freedom from the dominion and condemnation of sin, and from the Hebrew ritual, and heathen idolatry; and to flatter themselves with the presumption of freedom from all human government; and that the Apostles took care at once to correct their error and prescribe a general duty, by strongly enjoining obedience. It is also not improbable, that in this, as well as in other respects, they were called to extraordinary submissions and sacrifices, with extraordinary supports and promises; to be living and dying martyrs to the truth and to duty, for the introduction and propagation of the gospel. But we must acknowledge, that we are always required to be ready to be martyrs to the truth and to duty; and always required to obey just authority; if we may rationally endeavor to vindicate our rights against unjust domination. But if we have this right, or this liberty, and ability to use it with effect; the welfare of society requires, that it should not be used rashly, nor without sufficient cause and serious reason.





















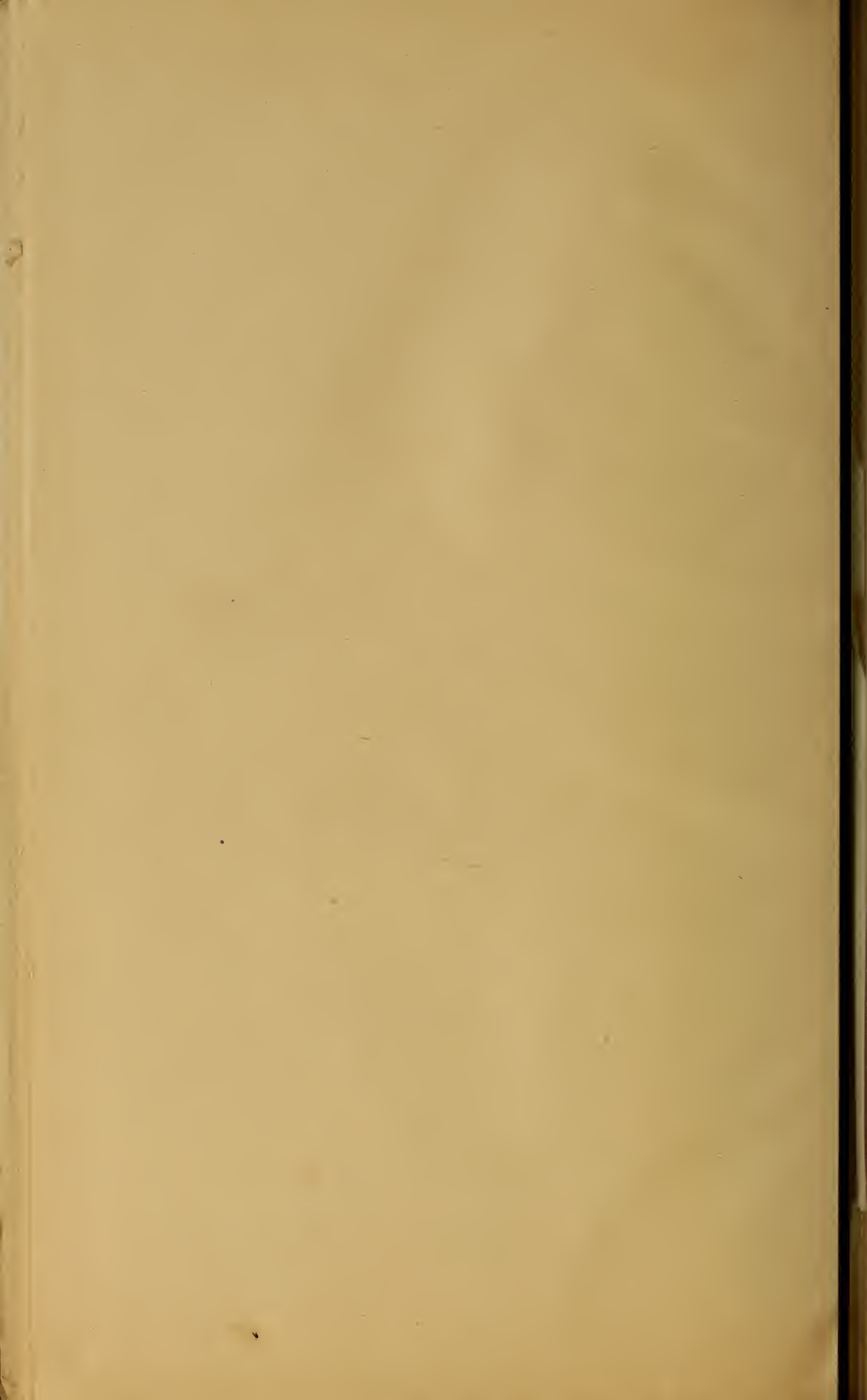






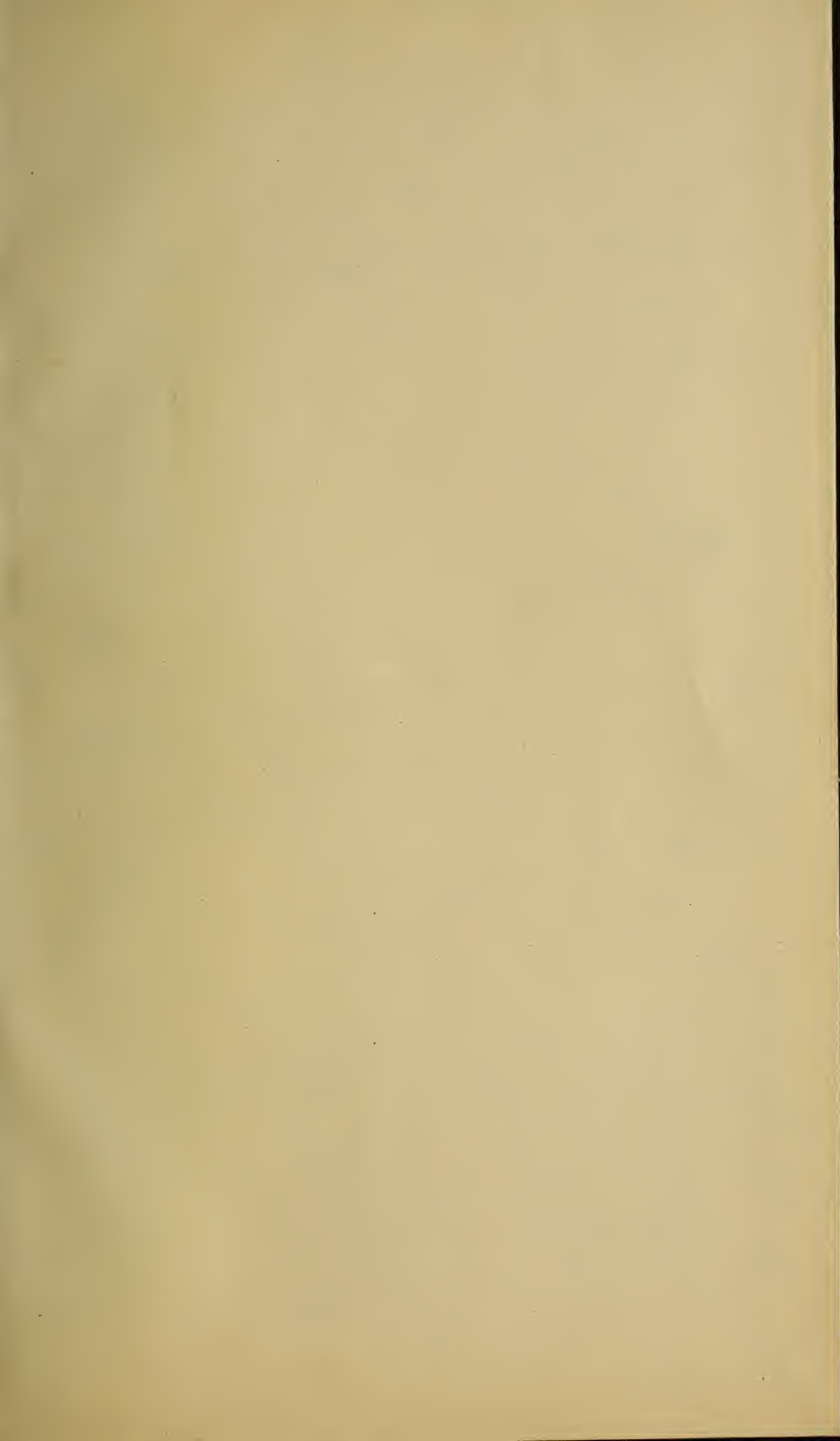


















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